

and he'd say, "Oh, I know about you. All my girlfriends have been Jewish. You all have fathers that are doctors and live in the suburbs and go to art school and camp." I go, "God, my dad's this little working-class guy who takes a lunchbox; he checks in at 8:00." First of all, I was working class, but the other part that I could not even touch was that my parents were Holocaust survivors. Not just that they were immigrants. . . . But they expected things of me that you would expect from an American Jew who had parents who were financially established. . . . I was sick of being misunderstood and having to just sit there with it—because I always seem to be in these relationships with these non-Jewish men who always have relationships with Jewish women. And it took one boyfriend saying something to me that really, I have to thank him, opened my consciousness. There was an ad on my refrigerator that my roommate had put up about a play where this mother tells her daughter about her experiences in the camp. And he walked by it and said, "Oh God, I am so sick about hearing about the Holocaust." . . . That finally got me pissed. Not in the sense that I said anything to him, but it made me aware that there was this huge gap between these men that I was involved with and what they knew about me. They thought they knew me because I did go to a good girls' school, I was educated. . . . But at that point I realized that I needed to do something. It was really years from that realization until I would connect, because I was living in L.A. at the time, and I knew so many children of survivors—this is really funny—that I didn't want to connect. Because I felt like Nina, that their parents had really been in camp, and mine hadn't. If I showed up at a meeting, how would that look? So moving to the Bay Area I was like this anonymous person and I finally could connect and feel like I could present myself as such. It's taken all these years and it feels like the first consciousness-raising sessions I had in the women's movement when you could finally talk about your oppression as a woman. It's just wonderful. I never thought I'd feel that again. I couldn't imagine where else I would feel that. In what other arena of my life? Sure enough, almost 20 years later, I've discovered something else. Like Helen Epstein's book; I still haven't finished it, because I would read it standing up in the BART and tears would pour down me. It's the most painful thing I've ever read.

*Interviewer.* Do you feel that you've gained anything as a result of being a child of a survivor? We've talked a lot about the down side—how difficult it was to feel your parents' pain and not be able to make up for that.

*Joel.* Well, I think whenever you overcome something that's really large, you gain a lot of depth of character. You gain a lot of compassion and you've learned a lot of things along the way. While I couldn't really

wish having to deal with that experience on anybody, I think having dealt with it for many years, at least feeling like I've dealt with a lot of the issues, I feel very full. I feel my character is very full. So I think that's what you get out of it. You get to know yourself well.

*Nina.* . . . I was always thinking about all the negative things that associate with being a child of survivors. I have a little bit of a different experience because I don't really think that my parents stopped living at all. I really admire my father greatly because he always said, "You can change jobs, you can do whatever you want in life, and you can overcome anything." While that's a burden because it's like, "Well, can't I just be hummed out and sit around and not do anything?" I feel like I have a strong need to excel—it's also wonderful. It gives me a lot of flexibility in my life that other people might not have. I also feel really moved by being the child of a Holocaust survivor, and I think that's why I decided to do this thing. I feel like, "Dammit, a lot of people tried to wipe us off the face of the earth and we're still around!" It's like in a way that makes me feel real rebellious, like I just want to do the best I can, and have children, put more of us around. It's really a great thing. I also feel that it's given me a lot of compassion toward other people and I'm not a namby-pamby kind of personality. Like I don't keep my mouth shut when I think people are being screwed over, and I say what I feel in certain situations where I don't think other people do, and I'm proud of that. So I think I actually gained a lot, and that probably the process is painful, but I think my father, actually, offered me a lot and gave me a lot.

*Miriam.* It's hard for me to separate out what I gained from my parents as individuals from their experience with the Holocaust because I think that my mother's a very feeling, compassionate person and my father was very progressive—like I said, a socialist—before. Nonetheless, I feel like it really is the ground I stand on, that the message I got was, you must fight for social justice forever on every front. That is your one commitment in this lifetime. My parents were really committed to fighting social injustice anywhere, against anyone, not just Jews. And I did, too. I was a social activist by an absurd age. I always tell the story that I refused to go into my second-grade class in 1956 because Stevenson had lost to Eisenhower, and I said to the teacher, "Not four more years of Eisenhower!" I was seven years old! The point is, I was just really committed. And I know my father was the first person who ever told me about Vietnam, long before I read it in the newspaper. He said, "You know, there's this country in Asia and they're sending advisors." And so I was very proud of my dad for being the first person I knew to be against the war in Vietnam. I was out there at 16 years old with my placards. . . . And that's something